

NO FRILLS PRISON ACT

HR 663

NO FRILLS PRISON ACT PRESS RELEASES

This page contains a series of 4 press releases from Congressman Zimmer's office and brief follow up comment by Strength Tech. Thanks to Mr. Todd Mitchell in Congressman Zimmer's office for faxing these press releases to me for posting on this web site so we can better understand Congressman Zimmer's position.

- January 31, 1995 Press Release
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- July 27, 1995 Press Release
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January 31, 1995 Press Release

LEGISLATION TO END PRISON PERKS WINS ENDORSEMENTS

Washington DC- U.S. Rep. Dick Zimmer's legislation aimed at stripping prisons of luxuries such as cable TV, Stairmasters and catered prime rib was endorsed Tuesday by two leading experts in the criminal justice field.

Robert Bidinotto, an investigative journalist and author of the book, Criminal Justice and James Fotis, Executive Director of the Law Enforcement Alliance of America (LEAA), said Zimmer's legislation was an important step toward ending costly prison perks.

The "No Frills Prison Act" (H.R. 663) would make prison construction and improvement money

available only to states that agreed not to provide inmates with such luxuries. It also would apply to federal prisons. *The bill was introduced last week, but Zimmer hopes to include it as an amendment to the crime bill to be considered as part of the Republican Contract with America.

Zimmer pointed out the following examples of prison luxuries:

- At the Jefferson City Correctional Center in Missouri, inmates have run their own around-the-clock, closed circuit TV station, routinely broadcasting movies containing sex and violence.
- At the Massachusetts Correctional Institution in Norfolk, prisoners serving life sentences have been allowed to invite guests to catered prime-rib dinners.
- In New York State, at a high-security prison in Fallsburg, prisoners have been able to jam in a music room full of electric guitars, drums, and keyboards - all courtesy of the taxpayer.
- The Oahu Correctional Facility in Honolulu provides aerobics classes and hula dancers as entertainment for its inmates.
- Prisoners at Olmstead County Jail in Minnesota receive their medical care at the prestigious Mayo Clinic.

"It's time to stop this abuse of the American taxpayer," Zimmer said. "We shouldn't be using taxpayer dollars to turn prisons into vacation spas."

"Why should the tax-paying victims of crimes be forced to give their victimizers the luxuries that they can't even afford themselves?" asked Bidinotto. "It's the inmates who should be paying for their own upkeep."

Fotis, a 13-year police veteran, said, "The 'No Frills Prison Act' is no nonsense punishment. I applaud Congressman Zimmer for moving forward with this legislation.

"Let's stop playing games, let's get tough with criminals, and let's worry more about the suffering of untold millions of crime victims and stop spending time concerned about inmates and their happiness," said Fotis.

February 9, 1995 Press Release

CLOSE THE DOOR ON FEDERAL "GALMOUR SLAMMERS"

**SUPPORT THE ZIMMER "NO FRILLS PRISONS"
AMENDMENT TO H.R. 667**

Dear Colleague:

- The federal penitentiary in Lompoc, Calif. offers an all-channel cable T.V., movies seven days a

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week, pool tables, handball, tennis and miniature golf.

- **The federal prison camp in Duluth, Minn. provides a movie theater, musical instruments, a softball field, and game rooms.**
- **The federal Correctional Institution in Estill, S.C., has "dormitories" with cathedral ceilings, carpeting, skylights, built in checker and chess tables, and handball courts.**
- **The federal penitentiary in Lewisburg, Pa. offers HBO and Cinemax to its resident drug dealers and killers.**

Not all federal prisons fit these descriptions or provide such amenities. But many do. That's why I plan to offer an amendment today to the crime bill to stop this abuse of taxpayer money.

Under my amendment, federal prisons would be required to provide "the least amount of amenities and personal comforts consistent with Constitutional requirements and good order and discipline in the Federal prison system." This provision is intended to eliminate luxuries such as in-cell televisions, pornographic materials, R, X, and NC-17 rated movies; personally owned computers;; in-cell coffee pots and microwave ovens; and expensive electronic musical instruments.

The amendment would also instruct the Director of the Bureau of Prisons to submit an annual report to Congress providing a breakdown of money spent at each federal correctional institution on prisoner amenities and non-essential programs.

I am not advocating a wholesale return to life on the chain gang, where circling a prison yard constituted recreation and a rock pile represented work. But, at a time when many Americans's are struggling to make ends meet and Congress is struggling to reduce federal spending, we should not be spending public money to pamper those who neither respect nor obey our laws.

If you have any questions about my amendment, please feel free to speak with me or have your staff contact Todd Mitchell of my office at 202-225-5801.

Sincerely,

Dick Zimmer

February 9, 1995 After Passage Press Release

ZIMMER'S BAN ON PRISON PERKS APPROVED IN HOUSE

Washington DC- U.S. Rep. Dick Zimmer's proposal to clamp down on prison luxuries like premium cable TV and miniature golf was approved on the House floor today.

By a voice vote, Zimmer's amendment, which is based on his "No Frills Prison Act," was added to the Contract with America crime bill.

"When you break the laws of this land, you should pay the price for your crime - not be rewarded

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with a vacation watching premium cable on your personal TV," said Zimmer. "There is no reason why we should be using taxpayer funds to finance inmate amenities."

The provision is intended to prohibit prison luxuries such as in cell television: pornographic materials; R, X, and NC-17 rated movies; personally owned computers and modems: in-cell coffee pots or other heating elements; and expensive electronic musical instruments.

It requires the federal prison system to "provide prisoners the least amount of amenities and personal comforts consistent with constitutional requirements and good order and discipline in the federal prison system."

"Some criminals have come to view jail as an almost acceptable lifestyle because amenities are better for them on the inside than on the outside." said Zimmer.

The Zimmer amendment also would instruct the Director of Bureau of Prisons to submit an annual report to COngress providing a breakdown of money spent at each federal correctional institution on amenities and non-essential programs.

"This amendment will give us the basis for subsequent remedial legislation," said Zimmer."

At the request of Rep. Bill McCollum (R-FL), the crime bill's floor manager, Zimmer limited the scope of his amendment to federal prisons. However, he said he will work to extend "no frills" requirements to state prisons receiving federal funds.

Zimmer's bill was backed last week by the Law Enforcement Alliance of American and Robert Bidinotto, a leading criminal justice expert and investigative journalist. Bidinotto wrote the Reader's Digest article, "Must Our Prisons Be Resorts?" which described numerous prison luxuries.

July 27, 1995 Press Release

HOUSE ADOPTS ZIMMER "NO FRILLS PRISON AMENDMENT"

Washington DC - HBO, X-rated movies, weight rooms and microwaves would be stripped from federal prisons under U.S. Rep. Dick Zimmer's "no frills" legislation approved Wednesday on the House floor.

"Prisoners should not have better accommodations on the inside than they would have had on the outside," said Zimmer. "If you break the law, you should pay the price, instead of being rewarded with a vacation watching X-rated movies on your personal TV set."

Zimmer's amendment of the Commerce, Justice, State and Judiciary Appropriations act states that no appropriated funds shall be used by the federal prison system to provide specific amenities, including in-cell cable television, R, X, and NC-17 rated movies; instruction or training in martial arts: weightlifting equipment: in-cell coffee pots or heating elements: and electronic musical instruments.

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"There is no reason why a criminal should be treated to state-of-the-art gyms or be permitted to watch premium cable television," said Zimmer. "And there is certainly no reason why taxpayers should foot the bill for such luxuries."

"At a time when many Americans are struggling to make ends meet and we in Congress are working to eliminate the deficit, we should not be spending public money to pamper those who neither respect nor obey our laws," said Zimmer.

The amendment is based on Zimmer's "No Frills Prison Act," which he introduced in January. His measure was endorsed by the Law Enforcement Alliance of America and Robert Bidinotto, a criminal justice expert.

In February, the House accepted Zimmer's "no frills" amendment to the Contract with America Crime bill. The amendment requires the Attorney General to set specific standards governing conditions in the federal prison system that provide prisoners the least amount of amenities and personal comforts consistent with constitutional requirements and good order and discipline. That amendment also requires the Bureau of Prisons to submit an annual audit to Congress listing exactly how much is spent at each federal prison for basics and how much is spent of "frills."

Strength Tech Comments

- **Although the bill / amendment obviously draws support from other groups (get tough on crime, they will muscle up and beat up guards and civilians, etc.) the bill sticks pretty close to the luxury issue.**
- **The bill only applies to funds contained in this appropriation. It would only be in effect for the remainder of fiscal 1996. It does not apply to commissary funds which are used to finance recreation in many institutions.**
- **The final version applied only to the federal prison system. All references to the state systems were removed.**
- **One point not apparent to those who have not visited institutions of this nature is the very bare minimal personal items allowed to a federal prisoner. The comments relating to personal coffee pots, microwaves, TV's, etc. are specific to certain state systems.**
- **Weight lifting equipment appears to be kind of loosely thrown in with the other items. In the press releases Stairmasters were mentioned once (I haven't seen many of them out in open rec yards). I think it was just a case of grouping a lot of items together as mentioned in the FACTS section of our List of Issues Page.**
- **Congressman Zimmer does talk about minimizing the amenities and yet providing "good order and discipline". Weight training has been proven to enhance discipline and increase order in correctional facilities.**
- **We agree the cost of recreational programs and items needs to be closely monitored. We feel it should be being done within the prison system by the Recreational Supervisors and Prison Administrators and then reported back to proper legislative authorities. Our difference here is**

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that total life cycle taxpayer costs need to be evaluated. These costs include things like the future health costs of the inmate (welfare), the costs to properly guard the population depending upon the various opportunities offered to them (recreation vrs. nothing), the costs of a devastating riot (most riots list poor recreation programs as a grievance), and the future costs that may be incurred after the inmate is released to the community (most of them are). The research community (universities and government funded research groups) need to do some background work in this area to help in estimating some of the parameters involved. This is beginning to happen. We are in contact with several researchers who are beginning to work in these areas. More are needed. Recreation Programs need to become financially accountable and use the taxpayers money wisely to help provide programs that minimize the life cycle costs of incarceration. We agree with Congressman Zimmer in this respect.

- **Again, a big thanks to Todd Mitchell in Congressman Zimmer's office for faxing us these press releases.**

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